

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY RESULTS REPORTED BY INTERIOR DEPARTMENT

The annual winter aerial survey of waterfowl distribution in the nation has been completed by the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, but bad weather in all survey areas ruled out any precise conclusion. Flying conditions or visibility, or both, were poor.

The survey, conducted with State fish and game departments, other Federal agencies and individuals, covers all important waterfowl wintering areas.

Because censuses cannot be conducted over remote and scattered grounds, midwinter counts are primarily distribution indicators and suggest population changes only for geese, swan, and brant.

The survey findings by flyway:

ATLANTIC FLYWAY

The east coast had one of the coldest survey periods in 34 years. The area from Virginia north was largely icebound and poor flying weather caused extended delays in the coverage of many areas as far south as Florida. The mast crop was excellent in the eastern United States and dabbling ducks were widely scattered in timbered bottomlands of the South.

The Canada Goose count was slightly above last year and indicates a continuing high population. Two-thirds of the geese were counted in Maryland.

MISSISSIPPI FLYWAY

Poor flying weather added two weeks to the survey. Snow and ice pushed most waterfowl out of Northern States to main wintering areas farther south where wide flooding dispersed birds into flooded timber. Dabbling ducks counted this January were fewer than in 1967, but flooded habitat and operational difficulties made the count questionable.

The flyway's Canada, blue, and snow geese populations totaled about the same as 1967.

CENTRAL FLYWAY

The 1968 survey in the Central Flyway must be regarded as the "least comparable" of all winter studies. Very cold weather blanketed northern States and inclement conditions delayed and extended surveys in southern areas, particularly Texas.

Blue, snow, and white-fronted geese counts were essentially unchanged from 1967, Canada geese increased slightly.

No duck population trends could be determined.

PACIFIC FLYWAY

Weather conditions in the inland States were much more severe than usual, while California was plagued with fog in the Central Valley. Poor conditions resulted in a less reliable count than any previous year except 1966. Pintails and dark geese were missed in the aerial counts because of poor visibility and fog-shortened census periods. However, a survey conducted specifically for Ross' geese in February showed a substantial increase for this species.